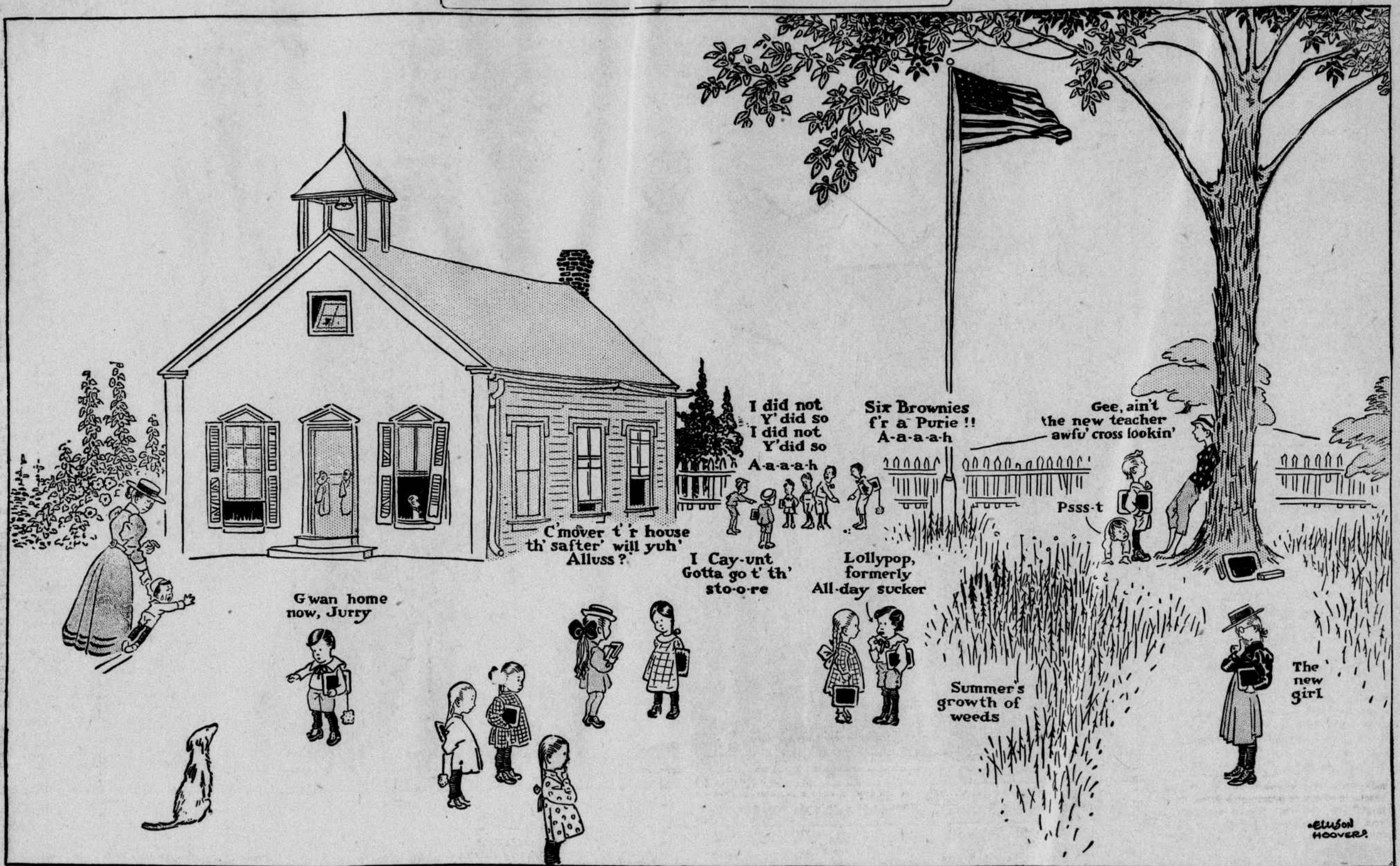


# WHEN WERE THE GOOD OLD DAYS?

## The First Day of School



## Labor Day Now Accepted as Official End of Summer Holiday Season

By TORREY FORD.

HOLIDAYS are funny things. The less we know about them the harder we take them. Volumes may be written on Why We Celebrate, and yet the average person refuses to be enlightened. For all practical purposes he prefers his own private interpretations of the days that appear on the calendar in spotted vermilion letters.

Which leads us on up to the faint but audible query as to why Labor Day, the day when nobody labors—that is, nobody but the train crews, the baggage men, the resort people, the baseballers and a few thousand other folk who just naturally can't get up any enthusiasm for rolling down their sleeves and putting on a white collar.

Why should Labor Day, the least important holiday as far as anniversaries are considered, be such a vital date in the annual schedule of the nation's activities? Who elevated it to such a peak of peerless prominence? Is it Samuel Gompers's birthday or a commemoration of the founding of the I. W. W.? Or what?

The ordinary citizen, well enough informed on most points, who celebrates Labor Day so strenuously, is apt to weaken when urged to set down a brief prospectus of the why and wherefore of the holiday. If he were a walking dictionary, the sort of person who could breeze through an Edison questionnaire without stopping for breath, he might be able to blurt through with a few vague hints that the day was set apart for Labor to do—well, to do something or other. One could never be too sure just what Labor was up to. And that is about all you could get out of him.

As a matter of fact, with the text books at hand, it wasn't too easy for an investigator to run on any set of facts that would provide a plausible excuse for closing down the banks of the country, jamming up the roads with motorists and causing the general hubbub that fits in with the regulation programme of Labor Day.

### Wild Goose Chase Resulted

### In Hunt for Its Origin

Poring over encyclopedia after encyclopedia, we were greeted with sentimental little phrases about "See Holiday" or "See Labor" or "See Knights of Labor." This only sent us on a wild goose chase through more volumes, where we absorbed considerable information that was well enough in its way but failed to advance the main theory. When Labor Day was mentioned at all it was done in a casual, humorless vein, veiling the facts and going in for odd vagaries that really didn't matter.

One encyclopedia, bursting with pride, announced bravely that the first Monday in September was observed in most States and Territories as Labor Day. Another went further than this and admitted that in 1921 September 5 would be observed as a holiday.

Opening of School Doubtless Is One Factor, but September Outdoors Usually Is One of the Best Months and Vacation Seekers Miss Much by Following Custom of Returning Cityward on First Monday

day in all parts of the United States and possessions with the exception of Wyoming and the Philippine Islands. No attempt was made to explain why Wyoming lagged or what was the matter with the Philippines. This was all left to inference, which is a poor way for an encyclopedia to sidestep an argument.

But finally, with the persistence of a born reporter, we came on an authority who was willing to go on record concerning the source and origin of Labor Day. This man (he may have been a woman, for all we know) had dipped into the history of the thing and had condensed his findings into an intelligent paragraph or so of pertinent gossip.

Back in 1882, he said, the Knights of Labor paraded in New York city on the first Monday in September. At the time, they had no idea of establishing a precedent or of forcing a holiday on future generations. They just paraded and had a good time, and it happened to be the first Monday in September.

### Colorado the First State To Make It a Legal Holiday

In 1887 the State of Colorado gave up the notion of trying to get anything accomplished with the majority of the workers off parading and declared the first Monday in September a legal holiday. Other States fell into line gradually, with only a feeble protest here and there. Just to be different and show a little independence, Louisiana persisted for a time in celebrating Labor Day in November. But to-day, as mentioned above, Wyoming is the only holdout in the regular United States.

Meanwhile things have been happening to the membership of the Knights of Labor, which reached a peak of 800,000 back in the nineties. There has been the advent of Samuel Gompers and the American Federation of Labor. Bill Haywood and the I. W. W. have come and gone. And then there are the Bolsheviks. The Knights have been crowded out of the headlines rather consistently. Some people only remember their existence around election time when the ballot bears that curious emblem adding another string of candidates to the list.

In spite of which and all that sort of thing, this Labor Day, private property of

the Knights of long ago, continues more violently and strenuously than ever.

It is, if you care to consider it from that angle, more than just a mere holiday. Besides closing down the shops and the more lenient of the offices for a three day vacation period, it serves the nation in various capacities that are surprising only when gathered together and wrapped up in the same package under a common label.

September 21 to the contrary notwithstanding, Labor Day pulls down the shade on summer in most communities east of the Mississippi. It closes the resorts, opens the schools and lifts the ban on metropolitan respectability. Whether it comes on the first day of September or the seventh, the whole thing works automatically. In some districts even Jack Frost holds off for a day or so until the holiday has officially been checked off the calendar.

Probably in Maine the Labor Day edict is obeyed more scrupulously than in any of the other States. Any one who has ever been in the Portland station along about noon on Labor Day can testify to the completeness with which the State is evacuated on that day by the tourists and summer visitors. They begin pouring out a few days before, but the big exodus comes on the holiday. Of all the houses that line the shore from Kennebunk to Bar Harbor, by nightfall not a

light will be glowing to cheer the passing mariner.

You might think there was a heavy demurrage charge on lingering after Labor Day had spent itself, or that the closed season began with energetic wardens rounding up the aliens and inflicting a punishment according to the law. Or if your mind ran to more practical matters you might suggest that possibly Maine wasn't much of a summer resort after the first week in September.

As for the last named alibi, we have experienced weeks in August when Maine was anything but a summer resort, when the fog settled in for a fortnight stay and the icebergs seemed just off shore. And we have seen weeks in September when day after day of gorgeous weather was rattled out of the box.

No, it isn't a question of weather or of law or demurrage. It's just a custom to leave Maine to the regular taxpaying citizens by Labor Day. Of course there are a few inland camps and lodges that keep open to take care of the hunters and fishermen. Otherwise the rule is quite inviolable.

Cape Cod and the White Mountains pass by during practically the same general metamorphosis. Jammed to the doors for the Labor Day week end, the resort hotels begin to thin out soon after breakfast on Monday morning. By noontime truck loads of trunks

are moving toward the station. Motorists pack up and get under way. By the time the dinner gong sounds there are so few people on hand that they serve real cream with the huckleberries. Perhaps they stage a holiday dance, but it is little more than a compliment to the orchestra. The gay young toddlers are all on the way back to the city.

### Exodus General Elsewhere

### Without Rhyme or Reason

A personal canvass of the hotel porch on Sunday afternoon might reveal some perfectly valid excuses for hustling back to town. One family would have to get back because the schools were opening; another so that Jennie could get her clothes fixed up before going off to college; another because the father could stand "baching it" until Labor Day and then he wanted his family back in their regular places. But most of them would be going back just because it was Labor Day and the established time to go.

They leave behind them two more weeks at least of summer and a full month of gorgeous fall, with the foliage beginning to turn and frosty mornings giving a snap to the air. But they are sick of the hotel food or tired of the inconveniences of the cottage, and it's Labor Day, anyway. So away they go—back to town.

The Adirondacks, the Catskills, the Jersey coast and the Poconos all report a similar tale. The regular dyed-in-the-wool patrons of the resorts may linger on to drain the last dregs of summer from the jug, but the big majority respond meekly to the curfew call of Labor Day. They may never have heard of the Knights of Labor, but they do know that the first Monday of September is the time to hurry back to town, hang up the curtains and draperies and start in on the schedule of fall activities.

In the big town itself Labor Day is marked by a transition quite different from the resort peaction. Things begin to hum. "Dark" theatres cease to be dark; tea rooms take down the signs about being closed on Sunday during the summer months; department stores forget the Saturday half holiday; shops on the avenue remove the bargain line marked up to all the traffic will bear.

Boarded up fronts begin to come down; lights appear in the apartment house windows; traffic on the avenue ceases to be a parade of sightseers and out-of-State motorists. People who have been in seclusion since early July, fearing some of their friends might notice that they couldn't afford to get away for the summer, come out with a new air of self-respect. It's all right to be in

town again. Labor Day has been checked off the calendar.

Perhaps the Board of Education fails to consider the Knights' holiday when planning the opening date for the public schools, but no parent or pupil helps in this neglect. Ask any youngster when his school opens, and he will answer you promptly in terms of so many days after Labor Day. He has had it bred in his system that in some mysterious manner Labor Day manages to open up the schools and wake up the truant officer.

Taking all these things into consideration, one wonders how we ever did get along before there was any Labor Day. How did people know when it was time to leave the summer resorts? What does Wyoming do, for instance, about the school situation?

And in almost the same breath one may ask what the people who flock to the winter resorts would do without Easter to tell them when to come home. Easter, with a range of nearly six weeks, is about as arbitrary in its ruling in the South as Labor Day in the North. April, the best time to visit the South that Florida can boast, may find the South deserted if Easter happens to come in March. People feel either that they couldn't get along without the Avenue or that the Avenue couldn't get along without them on an Easter morning.

So do they let the holidays tyrannize over them. And the more holidays the less freedom for the universe.

### Cannot Abolish a Holiday

### But Easy to Make One

It's easy enough to add a holiday to the list, but what a wall goes up when some one suggests erasing one! You could start a fight in any community by intimating that with the suppression of the firecracker Fourth of July has become a worn-out device. Yet four hundred years and more roll by before we get around to considering that Christopher Columbus deserves a few holiday trains, a special matinee and a day on the golf course, not to mention some brass band parades and a little oratory in his honor.

For a time we'll associate October 12 with the man who discovered America, and then we'll get to setting the date down as the day to start the furnace, to get out the heavy underwear, to see about covering up the rose bushes and getting in a cord of hard wood for the fireplace. Or we may remember it as the day they stage the finals in the club championship. Anyway, before long we find ourselves a long way from remembering about Columbus.

Holidays are, as we tried to hint in the opening stanza, funny things. But they are useful in our highly developed state of civilization. They help to unravel many a trying situation. And while the Knights of Labor may have had only a vague notion of what they were actually perpetrating in staging that initial parade back in '82, they deserve full credit for all that the first Monday in September has come to mean. They can even claim royalty on the sequel to the Labor Day legend.

Some one has suggested a Capital Day!